

GridEx VI
recap

Building WAPA's
safety culture

508 compliance
guidance

WAPA at its
best is...

• CLOSED • **Circuit**

WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION

JANUARY 2022



Preparing for tomorrow



Contents

GridEx tests WAPA's emergency readiness

In November, WAPA employees took part in the GridEx VI emergency exercise.

1

CSO shares journey to WAPA

*On Nov. 21, 2021, **Kerry Whitford** became the organization's chief strategy officer.*

4

508 compliance: a glimpse of the future

What is Section 508? What is your role? Why does it matter? Find out here.

6

Rail Tie Wind Project final EIS now available

The interconnection request was submitted by ConnectGen Albany County.

8

Reflecting on LDP's supercharged year

The Leadership Development Program had a very productive 2021.

10

WAPA at its best is...

***James Phillips** shares the six things that spotlight WAPA at its very best.*

12

Strategically building our safety culture

*Safety and Occupational Health Director **Jamie Withers** looks ahead.*

14

Rapid Recaps

- Senior leaders discuss future at annual meetings
- CIO speaks to Intelligence class

16

CLOSED Circuit

VOL. 44 NO. 1, January 2022

Editor: PHILIP REED

Graphic Designer: DANIELLE ORR

Do you have an idea for a story?
Contact reed@wapa.gov



**Western Area
Power Administration**

WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
P.O. Box 281213
Lakewood, CO 80228-8213
720.962.7050
www.wapa.gov | publicaffairs@wapa.gov

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS ISSUE  PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

On the cover

*A new day begins at one of WAPA's Hoover-to-Mead transmission lines in Nevada. (Photo by **Chris Lyles**)*





GridEx tests WAPA's emergency readiness

By Eric Barendsen

“

Exercise. Exercise. Exercise. Increased activity on social media by several extremist groups calls for protest, vandalism and attacks on equipment and personnel. Their goal is disruption of the power grid in the WAPA area.”

continued on Page 2



During a real-life electric grid emergency, Operations staff, such as Power System Dispatcher *Ernie Salcido*, must respond quickly to ensure the balance of load and generation is maintained. They must train at least once a year on techniques and strategies to restore the electrical system from blackout conditions and meet mandatory certification standards. (Photo courtesy of Scott Gregory.)

This alarming message is an example of an “inject,” or scenario that participants experienced as part of a recent nationwide training drill.

Over two days in November, WAPA, the Department of Energy and other utilities and organizations that support the power grid took part in the North American Electric Reliability Corporation’s GridEx VI emergency exercise.

The immersive simulation gives the electric industry, government agencies and other organizations a chance to practice implementing their emergency response and recovery plans in a safe environment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the

first year that WAPA held the event in a virtual setting.

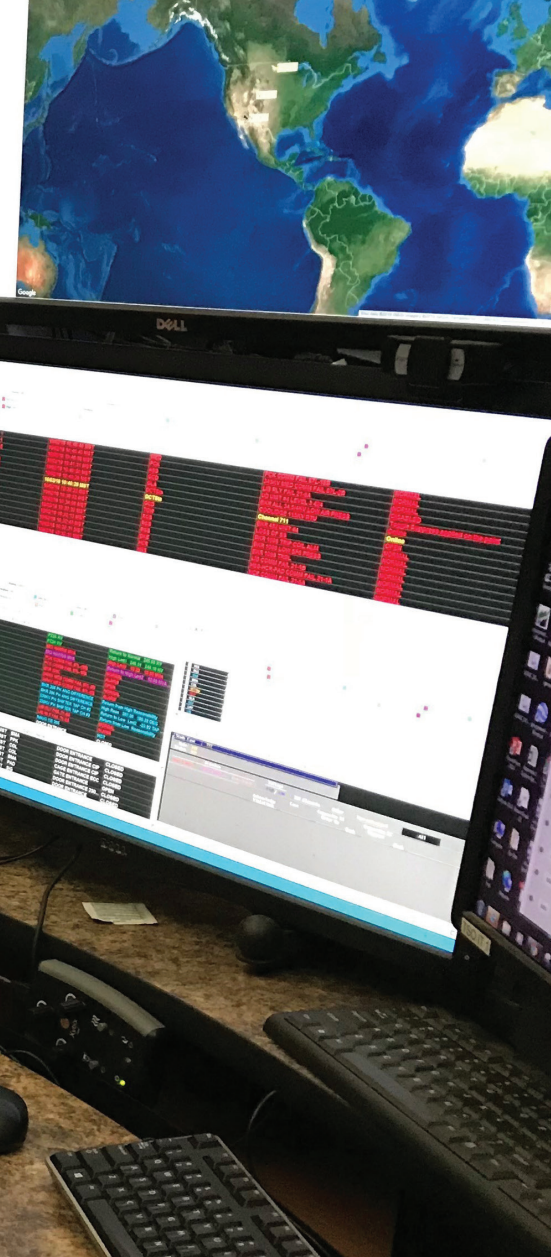
More than 120 WAPA “players” from across all regions, the Colorado River Storage Project Management Center, Headquarters and a wide range of functional groups tested their knowledge and skills while planners and evaluators observed their actions. At the same time, thousands of others across the utility industry and government participated in parallel events.

During the WAPA exercise, employees were challenged when a series of injects simulating cyberattacks and physical attacks took down, within the simulation, various IT, communication and electric power systems, eventu-

ally threatening employees’ physical security.

As impacts from protestors and cyberattackers escalated throughout the exercise, players had to figure out how to work around disruptions in the communications systems upon which they normally rely, such as email, cellphones and the internet.

“When communications went down during the exercise, we talked about how we would need to use sat phones,” Supervisory Electrical Engineer **Zea Flores** said, referring to portable satellite phones. “We need better training, familiarity and set-up configuration for some of these tools to stay in touch.”



"At times we can become over-reliant on our technologies, and this served as a reminder to all of IT's staff of what happens when these tools are unavailable," Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer **Mike Montoya** said.

One of the overarching purposes of GridEx is to identify areas for improvement and propose solutions to implement before a real emergency hits.

"We need to revisit our continuity of operations plans to make sure they work in a virtual environment, as well as have more holistic plans for communications policies and procedures for when different comms go out," Operations Manager **Jon Aust** said.

"Some of the approaches we could deploy include leveraging WAYS tickets and having common dashboards across cyber," Information Technology Specialist **Lee Ebreo** said, referencing WAPA's IT customer-request tracking

platform. "A common monitoring system to oversee various systems, including WAYS, would be a great place to start."

During the "hot wash" after the exercise, evaluators shared observations of how the players fared.

"What jumped out at me was folks not having cross-functional knowledge of what other parts of WAPA do and, most importantly, what corrective actions we could take," IT Cybersecurity Specialist **Jim Ball** said.

"We've become so dependent on technology that I think we need to take a step back and look to see how we can manually fly the plane when all the automated controls fail," said Vice President of Technical Services **Steve Yexley**.

Players also discussed ways in which the exercise could be enhanced.

"Have a consistent approach to releasing injects to everyone," Physical Security Specialist **Justin Ramsay** suggested. "There was often confusion when an inject was announced to participants who aren't directly involved in that function."

WAPA used the Cisco WebEx platform to run the exercise. Breakout rooms created the virtual spaces for various organizational units to meet, such as regional emergency operations centers, which would be stood up during a real emergency.

"A drawback of using WebEx was that the chat thread would be lost when moving to another breakout room, so Teams might work better," said Power Operations Advisor **Cory Danson**. WAPA recently adopted Microsoft Teams as part of its Modern Workplace initiative.

WAPA had good reasons to practice using WebEx and Teams to conduct emergency operations.

"In a real-life loss of other comms, the way our emergency groups were structured with various breakout rooms could work in the real world as an emergency comms tool, as long as we have internet," said Supervisory Information Technology Specialist **Kim Kelly**.

Ultimately, GridEx VI served as a stimulating environment to analyze how WAPA and the broader electric utility industry can improve their resilience and react to adverse conditions.

"We had some great discussions about how the Southwest Power Pool's grid would have responded to the renewable energy generation impacts," Supervisory Power System Dispatcher **John Roemen** said.

WAPA's participants generally found GridEx to be a valuable use of time and resources.

"I tend to scrutinize our investments of time along the same cost-versus-benefit metric I apply to WAPA's investments of capital," Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer **Mike Peterson** said. "In my assessment, the two days invested in GridEx was time well spent."

As in past exercises, communications emerged as an area of critical importance and one that WAPA continues to improve.

"This was the first GridEx where people acknowledged and tried to address the internal communications piece," said Public Affairs Specialist **Lisa Meiman**. During the exercise, players made a concerted effort to practice notifying employees internally of the unfolding scenarios. "Usually that's something that's left behind in the speed of trying to respond to the external events."

"Highlighting communication practices has been a general theme in every exercise we've had," Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer **Kevin Howard** said. "These exercises really help us practice critical communication skills—knowing who to reach out to and how to make information-sharing occur."

The event continues to challenge and inspire both the players, whose role involves just two days every two years, and the 24 planners, who spend countless hours preparing for it.

"I'm very impressed with the level of engagement from all the players on this, and I'm very thankful for our team of planners who have worked so hard over the past nine months to bring this together," said Emergency Management Specialist **Tarra Keathley**, who helped organize the event.

WAPA's GridEx planning group is working on the after-action report to share with senior leaders in early 2022.

□

Note: The author is a public affairs specialist.

CSO shares journey to WAPA



O

n Nov. 21, 2021, **Kerry Whitford** officially joined WAPA as the organization's chief strategy officer. Whitford brings decades' worth of experience in strategic planning, performance measurement and stakeholder relations to the role.

"As our chief strategy officer, Kerry will champion employee engagement and build and maintain relationships with customers, industry leaders and Department of Energy representatives," said Administrator and CEO **Tracey LeBeau** in her announcement. "She will also lead the advancement of performance measurement, continuous process improvement and change management initiatives."

Prior to joining WAPA, Whitford had been with the Bureau of Reclamation for 23 years. After so much time, many people would be in the mood for a change. Whitford, however, was in the mood for this *specific* change.

"I had been with Reclamation since 1999, and in my most recent position since 2017, and was looking for the next challenge," Whitford said. "I was job hunting, but nothing seemed to fit. When I saw the job announcement for the chief strategy officer position, I

thought, 'This is it!' Not only did the job requirements fit my experience to a T, but so did WAPA's mission."

She explained that her experience at Reclamation had given her a solid understanding of the important issues surrounding water and hydropower in the West. She also developed an understanding of WAPA's power marketing mission, which helps her to understand the context in which the organization's strategy is developed.

To her, a transition to WAPA seemed like a natural next step.

"I was so excited about the opportunity that I began working on my application that night," she said. "In fact, my manager, who was supporting me in my search, saw the announcement as well, and personally texted me and said, 'If you don't apply for this job, you're crazy!'"

Whitford's interest in the field started early. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Conservation

from the University of Colorado Boulder and a Master of Public Administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

"I started my career at the Environmental Protection Agency in Denver in 1991 as the State Assistance Program manager," she explained. "My duties included facilitating the development of performance partnership agreements between the EPA and states and Tribes for millions of grant dollars. This role instilled in me the importance of collaboration between the federal government and its stakeholders to achieve mutual goals."

Once Whitford moved to Reclamation, she received an even more thorough education.

"Although my position as strategic planner at the Bureau of Reclamation was not necessarily considered a 'main mission' job, the position was

like a graduate school degree in Reclamation's mission and programs," she said. "I worked with office deputy directors and program subject matter experts to define program goals, objectives and performance measures across the spectrum of Reclamation's programs. In a short amount of time, I found myself knowing more people and more programs than other employees and even leadership team members who had worked there much longer than I had."

It was a crash course that provided Whitford with a significant understanding of many complicated concepts and responsibilities. It also positioned her to understand WAPA's evolving role in the industry.

"My biggest takeaway from my experience at Reclamation was that water is the life blood of the West, and water issues are extremely complex," explained Whitford. "There is no silver bullet to solving western water issues and there will forever be a constant tug and pull to balance competing priorities. Solving them is only possible through collaboration and innovation."

Her time at Reclamation was eye opening in many ways, and while her work with them was challenging, she is quick to let others know that it was also rewarding.

Some of her most cherished memories from those 23 years are flying in a tiny plane over the Grand Coulee Dam, acting as chief of staff during the change in Administration in 2020 and participating in a hands-

on workshop on Columbia River operational issues on a houseboat tour of the river with representatives from states, Tribes, environmental groups and other federal agencies.

"I also learned a great deal from others about what it means to be a dedicated employee," she said. "They are incredibly smart, passionate about their subject matter and hard working. Although being a federal government worker often gets a bad rap in the public eye, working at Reclamation made me extremely proud to call myself a fed."

Whitford is optimistic that she can leverage her experience to help WAPA strategically evolve in a way that best positions the organization to meet the challenges and opportunities to come.

"First and foremost, I believe I'm a natural strategist," she said. "It's in my DNA and my Myers-Briggs Type. I am always thinking about the future end goal and the steps needed to get there. I have also been known for my abilities to bring different groups together to accomplish a significant deliverable. I like to learn new things and be challenged."

She went on to discuss her philosophy in regard to strategic planning.

"I believe strategic planning is just as much about the journey as it is the destination," she said. "My goal is to facilitate a strategic planning process that is inclusive, stimulates organizational learning and improvement and brings WAPA

together around common goals and themes. Ultimately, I hope the strategic plan priorities and goals resonate with our leadership, employees and stakeholders alike, and become the organizing framework to which all programs can align their work activities and resources."

In her free time, Whitford describes herself as being an "outdoors lover and adrenaline junkie."

"One of my favorite activities is to discover a new mountain bike trail," she said. "I recently rode 21 miles of the Palisades Plunge, a newly designed trail from the top of the Grand Mesa into Palisades. It was one of the most beautiful and dangerous trails I have ever ridden. My adrenaline was definitely pumping!"

She is also a lover of the arts and a former thespian. What's more, it seems to run in the family.

"Both of my daughters go to Denver School of the Arts and I so enjoy watching my youngest perform in her vocal choir and my eldest produce visual artworks," she said. "Also, I love a good concert, especially if it's at Red Rocks."

Whitford is excited to apply her knowledge and skills to her new role, and is particularly happy about meeting and working with her new colleagues.

"WAPA has an amazing reputation as a great place to work," Whitford concluded. "I'm looking forward to getting to know the WAPA community and learning from everyone." □





508 compliance: a glimpse of the future

By Nathan Alarid

Imagine stepping into the space station, blind. You are touching mission-critical control panels. One button says launch, the other says abort. The fate of the mission depends on which button you press. Will you be grateful that the panels were designed with accessibility in mind? Or will the mission fall apart because they weren't?

In order to avoid that problem and so many others in the future, we need to be sure we address it today, through 508 compliance.

What is Section 508?

Section 508 is part of the 1998 amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

It requires federal electronic content to be accessible to everyone. In 2022, WAPA will continue to enhance its crucial push for organizationwide 508 compliance.

Federal agencies are required to develop, procure, maintain and use information and communications technology that is accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 requires them to make their applications, websites, video, multimedia and online training accessible for all users.

This includes all web-related content, including documents, presentations, images, videos and social media.

Why is accessibility important?

Accessibility ensures that all users can access content, regardless of their personal capabilities.

Individuals with disabilities are those who have sensory, physical or cognitive impairments that substantially limit their ability to perform at least one major life activity.

Examples of people who may rely on Section 508 include those who are deaf or hearing impaired; are unable to speak or have speech impairments; are blind or have vision impairments or color blindness; have motor-skill disabilities; have cognitive disabilities or reading disabilities, such as dyslexia; and have photosensitive epilepsy.

It is important to note that some individuals with disabilities may still require accommodations for access, depending on their needs.

Making online content 508 compliant ensures that people with disabilities who use screen readers and other assistive technologies can access descriptive information contained in "alternative text" and other 508 features. The aim is to increase understanding for everybody.

Who is responsible for 508 compliance?

Every WAPA employee plays a role in complying with Section 508.

The federal government increasingly relies on technology to carry out its business and deliver information, from creating files to managing contracts, which makes ensuring access for individuals with disabilities part of everyone's job.

This includes anyone who creates files or authors documents. If you create files that may be distributed through email, posted online or shared through another electronic format, you will need to know how to make your files accessible.

It also includes all supervisors. If you are responsible for managing staff, be sure that they understand the importance of ensuring accessibility and have access to the training and knowledge that will allow them to fulfil their responsibility for 508 compliance.

It includes anybody who owns or coordinates web content, either on the intranet or the external website. Anybody who is managing or devel-

oping a website will need to follow 508 requirements for web content.

It includes all project and program managers. If you are responsible for planning a project or managing a program, it is your responsibility to allow time for Section 508 reviews and corrections, if necessary.

These are only a few of the roles at WAPA that will need to understand and practice 508 compliance. Familiarizing yourself with it now is critical.

Plan ahead: The future of 508

Federal agencies are responsible for ensuring that their information and services are accessible to persons with disabilities. The revised 508 requirements include not only Information Technology tools and systems, but electronic content such as documents, web pages, presentations, social media, blogs and emails.

Remember: Before any content can be made public, it must be Section 508 compliant.

The time to address these considerations is now, before someone is at that control panel with its "launch" and "abort" buttons. If you want the decision to be clear tomorrow, 508 compliance must be established today.

WAPA's Section 508 Team

Launched by the Department of Energy, WAPA's Public Affairs office created a Section 508 team.

This team identifies, establishes and provides guidance in Section 508 program management. The mandate under Section 508 enables the team to guide employees to conform electronic content to current Section 508 standards.

This involves ensuring that accessibility is considered throughout the content development lifecycle; providing awareness and education about 508 requirements based on an employee's role within WAPA; and using section508.gov and Microsoft SharePoint Online tools, such as the Accessibility Requirements Tool and Solicitation Review Tool, to provide resources to assist employees in effective implementation of 508 requirements.

The Section 508 team is available to assist with technical support, guidance and advice relating to implementation

of Section 508 requirements and assisting with a disability issue here at WAPA.

Look forward to more information about 508 compliance in the future, including key tips and tricks in *Closed Circuit*. □

Visit myWAPA, **Departments, Public Affairs, Section 508** for resources to help you create, test and remedy the content you share online in compliance with Section 508 requirements. If you still have questions, contact section508@wapa.gov



Note: The author is a webmaster who works under the Wyandotte Services contract. Amber Rodriguez contributed to this story.

What can create an accessibility problem?

When creating content, pay particular attention to:

- Images.
- Captions.
- Color.
- Data tables.
- Dynamic and interactive content.
- Forms.
- Navigational elements and links.

Benefits of 508 compliance

Complying with the Section 508 requirements:

- Eliminates barriers.
- Provides equal opportunities to persons with disabilities.
- Encourages development of technologies that enable these goals.
- Provides standards for how accessibility can be achieved.
- Helps prepare for an aging workforce.



Rail Tie Wind Project final EIS now available

Western Area Power Administration has released a final environmental impact statement, or EIS, for the interconnection of the proposed Rail Tie Wind Project.



WAPA is evaluating an interconnection request submitted by ConnectGen Albany County, LLC, to connect the Rail Tie Wind Project to WAPA's existing Ault-Craig 345-kilovolt line in Albany County, Wyoming.

Because this project involves an action by the federal government, WAPA prepared an EIS for the interconnection request and proposed wind project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The Environmental Protection Agency published the EIS notice of availability in the Federal Register on November 19, 2021. The EIS analyzes the expected environmental impacts of both WAPA's federal action and ConnectGen's proposed Rail Tie Wind Project.

In accordance with NEPA, WAPA held a 45-day public comment period on the draft EIS that began on April 2, 2021, when the EPA published the draft EIS notice of availability in the *Federal Register*, and ended on May 17, 2021.

During the public comment period, the public, interested parties and other agencies were invited to provide comments and ask questions about the draft EIS. All comments were fully considered in the EIS and preserved in the administrative record.

The proposed Rail Tie Wind Project, which would be owned by ConnectGen, would include up to 149 wind

turbines with a generating capacity of up to 504 megawatts. The wind project would be located on an approximately 26,000-acre site roughly centered on the town of Tie Siding, Wyoming, and bisected by U.S. Highway 287.

In addition to the turbines, the proposed project would include access roads, collection lines, substations, control buildings, meteorological towers and other related infrastructure. If WAPA decides to approve the interconnection request after the environmental process is complete, WAPA would construct, own, operate and maintain a connection with the existing transmission line and a switchyard to control power flow onto the existing line. More information is available on WAPA's project website and the ConnectGen website. □

Note: This article is adapted from WAPA's news release on the subject, dated Nov. 19, 2021, with alterations made only for publication formatting.

For more information, visit
**wapa.gov, Transmission, Environmental
review-NEPA, Rail Tie Wind Project**





Reflecting on LDP's supercharged year

By Sarah P.

The Leadership Development Program aims to cultivate learning and leadership by developing authentic leaders who embody WAPA's core values and leadership competencies. Creating opportunities that enable employee potential, develop the current and next generation of leaders and attract and retain top talent is not an easy business, but it's a fulfilling one.

In 2021, the LDP has run and launched several programs, which have reached more than 1,000 individuals across WAPA and the Department of Energy.

20:20:20 Supervisor Forum

Supervisors meet the second Wednesday of every month for 20 minutes of presentation from senior leaders at WAPA, followed by 20 minutes of guided conversation on this topic in breakout groups and then 20 minutes of free networking within those breakout groups.

In 2021, more than 200 supervisors heard from 12 senior leaders on topics such as How to Have Difficult Conversations, Leading Teams Through Change, Don't Take the Monkey, Public Service Motivation, Political Savvy and the D.C. Environment, Employee Recognition and more.

360 Leadership Assessments

The 360 Leadership Assessment helps individuals gauge their development in

all 27 WAPA competencies listed in the LDP's Leadership Competency Model.

Participants rated themselves and selected a team of colleagues and other individuals for feedback rankings, ranging from Level 1, fundamental awareness, to Level 5, expert. A total of 607 assessments were completed for 61 individuals in 2021 alone.

Leadership Essentials Series Monthly Webinars

Nearly 200 individuals each month tune in for various leadership topics ranging from senior leadership interviews to workshops on skills to add to your leadership toolbelt.

The LDP partnered with organizations such as the Ombudsman, Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, higher education institutions and others to bring these webinars to WAPA.

Topics included an interview with Administrator and CEO **Tracey LeBeau** and Leadership and Safety with Safety and Occupational Health Director **Jamie**

Withers. There were also webinars on Networking, Leading Through an Equity Lens, Creativity in the Chaos and the Mundane, Career Pathing, Decision Making, Burnout and Disengagement and more.

Line by Line Non-Book Book Club

Line by Line is a monthly forum where leadership topics are uncovered and discovered. Each month, participants review a leadership-focused topic through various media, such as videos, podcasts, articles and sometimes books!

In 2021, the program hosted approximately 30 individuals each month, covering 10 Habits of Highly Resilient People, Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, Are You a Giver or a Taker?, Hidden Brain Podcast: The Double Standard, The Dunning-Kruger Effect, Crucial Conversations, The Power of Disconfirming Evidence and many other topics that challenged individuals to see beyond their own perspectives and take what they've learned back to their teams.

Foreman Leadership Program

More than 40 foremen participated in this ongoing program to develop their professional skills and prepare themselves for future leadership positions.

Topics covered in their sessions with the Leadership Development Team include team building; emotional intelligence, including an assessment performed by certified professional Leadership Development Specialist **Brittanie Paquette**; resilience and psychological safety as it pertains to leadership; and physical safety in the workplace.

Emerging Leaders Development Program

The ELDP recently graduated its first cohort of 30 individuals. The Leadership Development Program extends a hearty congratulations to these individuals on their completion of such an involved program. They've taken significant steps to further their professional development and better themselves as leaders.

For more information, see "ELDP graduates first cohort" in the December 2021 issue of *Closed Circuit*.



Senior Leadership Development Program

Seven individuals at WAPA participated in the SLDP, a curriculum-based program offered by the Center for Creative Leadership and the University of Michigan.

These are 40-hour programs hosted over many weeks, focusing on the journey toward becoming a transformational leader who can engage employees, inspire people and build a culture defined by collaboration and commitment.

Participants engage in topics such as positive and authentic leaderships, goal setting and creating a motivational culture through a combination of action-learning experiences, interactive lectures, group discussions, team exercises, case studies and real business projects.

The SLDP also includes one year of coaching and mentoring after completion of the curriculum.

Mini Summit

With the onset of COVID-19, strong leadership skills have never been more in demand. Organizations around the world require agile responses to evolving short- and long-term needs. On Oct. 6-7, the LDP hosted a virtual Mini Leadership Summit centered around the book *Mastering Leadership* by Robert Anderson and William Adams.

More than 200 of WAPA's team leads, supervisors and managers heard from speakers from The Leadership Circle, as well as Sacramento Municipal Utilities District CEO Paul Lau, motivational speaker Anita "AC" Clinton of Be Great Global, Equal Employment Manager **Charles Montañez** and Leadership Development Program Managers Brittanie Paquette and **Troy Steadman**.

The Mini Summit focused on leading in a hybrid world and the need to incorporate *Mastering Leadership* principles called Creative and Reactive Leadership.

For more information, see "Mini Summit explores leadership styles" in the November 2021 issue of *Closed Circuit*.



The WAPA-wide Mentoring Program

The long-awaited WAPA-wide Mentoring Program arrived in November, immediately exceeding the LDP's goals with more than 60 individuals signing up to participate.

Mentoring is a key component of leadership development and aligns with WAPA's core value of "Seek. Share. Partner," as well as the Leadership Development competency of "relationship management." The first official cohort begins this month and will run through June.

Participants will complete Strengths Finders assessments, meet monthly with their mentoring partner and grow in their knowledge of WAPA, their industry and each other.

Professional Coaching

This program launched for supervisory positions at WAPA in October 2021. Leaders can get individualized coaching sessions to help them work through career development, analysis paralysis, employee development and more.

The goals of this program are to increase the leadership acumen among WAPA's supervisory core, promote diverse approaches to problem solving, bring awareness to individually held blind spots and provide another option and resource for overall professional skill development.

Open Enrollments

These skill-based workshops connect WAPA with subject matter experts in all kinds of topics, such as Influencing and Political Savvy and Interviewing Skills. They help participants learn tools, such as using a delegation model, theories of employee motivation and steps for giving and receiving feedback.

In 2021, more than 400 individuals received training from the LDP's various open enrollment offerings, and WAPA's first group of individuals will be receiving the two-part Conflict Management training beginning this month, followed by additional open enrollment opportunities, such as Communicating Scope and Impact.

Upcoming Programs: Learning Leadership Intensive

WAPA's new program, Learning Leadership Intensive, or L₂I, is launching for dynamic self-starters with proven communication and leadership skills.

This program is designed for individuals who desire to serve in higher-level leadership positions in the organization. L₂I prepares them for the next level via traditional, experiential and developmental experiences. If you are a GS-13, GS-14, AD-5 or AD-6, keep an eye out for an email notification to formally announce the program early this year. □

Note: The author is a leadership development specialist.



WAPA at its best is...

By James Phillips

I have been in the workforce for more than 50 years. I have had a lot of jobs and a lot of employers, but I've never worked for an organization quite like WAPA.

“In civilian life, service to our country doesn’t come much better than this.”

I believe that WAPA’s success has a lot to do with its culture, and its culture is created by its employees. It is created by the way in which we conduct ourselves daily in our professional lives. As WAPA employees, we have a sense of shared values. We take our cues from each other. We demonstrate our shared values every day by what we say and what we do.

Last year, when I received an Exceptional Service Award, I thought about the aspects of WAPA’s culture that most closely resonate with me and energize me. Six things came to mind that I believe illustrate WAPA at its very best.

WAPA at its best is open and welcoming.

At WAPA, new employees are quickly brought into the family. They are valuable members of the team and are made to feel welcome. They are accepted and appreciated for the contributions they will make to fulfilling our mission.

We celebrate each other’s successes. Whether that’s in the form of awards or other recognition, we understand that anyone’s success is success for all of us, for WAPA and for the customers we serve.

WAPA at its best is transparent.

As employees, we are kept informed of the direction in which the organization is headed, as well as the challenges that the organization faces.

Senior leaders model and ensure this transparency by meeting with us regularly and by inviting us to listen in to portions of their meetings. We have publications, such as this one, and an intranet that we can refer to whenever we need to know what is happening in and around WAPA.

Additionally, we are invited to participate in finding solutions to organizational problems. The Inclusion, Innovation and Technology Summit is built entirely around this concept, and leaders look forward to hearing our perspectives. We are stronger as an organization as a result.

WAPA at its best is collaborative.

Job information is shared freely among employees, keeping each other informed and doing our best to avoid working in silos wherever possible. People do not hoard information; they work collaboratively with others to make sure everybody who needs that information will have access to it.

We readily work across organizational boundaries, and are encouraged to do so. If Upper Great Plains has a solution for a difficulty faced in Sierra Nevada, the two will work together to solve it.

WAPA does not suffer from “Not-Invented-Here Syndrome.” If an idea is good, it will find support, and once an idea has been accepted, it belongs to all of WAPA. No one person claims sole ownership, because we are all in this together.

WAPA at its best is focused.

Measured only by the number of employees, WAPA is a middleweight in the electric utility industry. If we measure it by our miles of transmission lines and influence within the industry, however, WAPA is a heavyweight.

WAPA punches above its weight class. This can only happen because our workforce is highly skilled, very experienced, dedicated and focused on doing their jobs efficiently.

Our ability to focus allows us to excel as public servants. It’s what allows us to provide premium service to

customers and ensure that we are able to address unanticipated obstacles as they arise.

WAPA at its best is open to new ideas and innovation.

WAPA looks forward, not backward. This applies to everything from new work processes to new technology. We understand that innovation is the key to staying relevant into the future and providing the best possible service to the more than 40 million Americans who rely on us.

The annual I2T Awards are evidence of WAPA’s innovative spirit and were created for the express purpose of celebrating it. The Organizational Approach to Markets initiative is further evidence of WAPA’s innovative spirit, as are the many other initiatives that reflect WAPA’s dedication toward a reliable and resilient tomorrow.

WAPA at its best is found in employees living the mission.

Our mission statement is: “Safely provide reliable, cost-based hydro-power and transmission to our customers and the communities we serve.” What an honorable way to serve our country and support critical national infrastructure. In civilian life, service to our country doesn’t come much better than this.

Millions of our fellow citizens depend on the services we provide, and I see the mission reflected every day in WAPA’s employees. □

Note: The author is WAPA’s vice president of Information Technology – supervisory control and data acquisition. This article was adapted from his comments at the Exceptional Service Award ceremony for Ron Tritz on Oct. 1, 2021.

Strategically building our safety culture

By Jamie Withers



WAPA is responsible for providing a safe workplace that is free of recognizable hazards. Our most critical asset is our employees, and we are committed to protecting them by implementing controls to reduce workplace hazards. We also rely on employees to protect themselves and others as part of our overall safety culture.

Safety is one of WAPA's Strategic Enablers, as identified in our Tactical Action Plan. The other enablers are Communication; Inclusion and Diversity; and Partnership and Innovation. They are the four cornerstones that support our foundation of organizational success at WAPA.

Each enabler also has a direct effect on our organizational safety culture.

Safety

In the workplace, safety is protection from hazards, injury, illness or death, based on laws enforced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The influence of safety culture goes far beyond any single employee, manager, crew or department. Safety culture is the result of a collective set of behaviors, standards, values and expectations. These qualities combine to establish an organizational safety culture that benefits everyone involved.

An organization with a healthy safety culture proactively seeks feedback, responds openly to safety issues and engages employees and management to integrate safety into all systems and job activities.

Communication

Safety at WAPA is all about communication. This includes discussion of incident prevention during Job Hazard Analysis briefings or tailgate meetings. It also includes educating employees through articles in *Closed Circuit* and our bimonthly newsletter, *Safety Works*.

Prevention communication is also rooted in learning from past events by sharing Near-Miss Reports or Learning Summaries with a goal of informing others through shared safety experiences.

Field crews prevent incidents by watching out for each other and communicating hazards, while managers and safety specialists do the same through jobsite observations. Communication is at the center of our

safety culture, and it is up to all of us to use it to protect ourselves and others by always keeping the lines of communication open.

Inclusion and Diversity

Including everyone in the discussion about safety is important, because you never know who might one day recognize a hazard that will save you from injury.

Whether it be an apprentice on a jobsite or a coworker in the office, physical and psychological safety for everyone is key to protecting all employees from physical and emotional harm. They also help develop empathy for others.

After almost two years of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, empathy will be an important element as teleworkers integrate back into the workplace. We will need to be flexible and understanding of each other's challenges and needs, while also acknowledging the talents and value that each of us brings to our work environment.

By doing this, we will build teamwork and partnership with others.

Partnership and Innovation

By being inclusive and empathetic, we open the door to a more positive and safer workplace. It starts with open communication, by listening to others and sharing information that builds trust, collaboration and increased employee engagement.

All of these elements foster innovation, new ideas on how to improve safety systems and an understanding of why safety is important to all of us.

The end results can lead to better decision making, reduction of errors, fewer safety incidents and a stronger safety culture.

A team effort

Building a strong safety culture is a team effort and each of us plays a key role in its success. This includes recognizing our safety responsibilities

and accepting that they are essential in protecting ourselves and others.

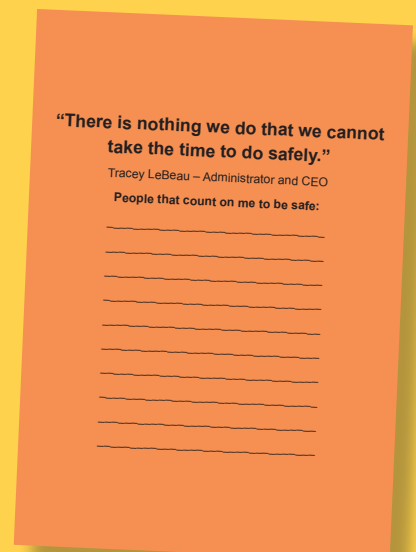
We have cultivated a strong safety culture at WAPA over the years and deserve to be proud of it at all levels. We also must recognize that there is always room for growth and opportunity for improvement.

As we enter this new year, let's continue to build on our well-established foundation of safety culture and remember that we don't do it because of laws enforced by OSHA; we do it because we value safety, and we all have family, friends and coworkers who count on us to be safe. □

Note: The author is WAPA's Safety and Occupational Health director.

Remembering those who rely on us

This year's *Power System Safety Manual* has a series of blank lines on the inside cover under a heading that reads, "People that count on me to be safe." The lines are there for all of us to write and remember the names of those who count on us to be safe and return home safely every day.



Senior leaders discuss future at annual meetings

In early December, many of WAPA's senior leaders presented at and participated in several annual meetings, reflecting on the challenges of 2021 and looking ahead to 2022.

On Dec. 6, Administrator and CEO **Tracey LeBeau** spoke at WAPA's Annual Customer Meeting, where she debuted Reflect, Recharge, Resolve as the organization's theme for the new year. She was joined by Senior Vice President and Assistant Administrator for Corporate Liaison **Dionne Thompson**, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer **Mike Peterson** and Power Marketing Advisor **Rodney Bailey**, who also spoke at the event.

Later that day, LeBeau spoke during the Mid-West Electric Consumers Association Board Meeting, where she was joined by Senior Vice President and Rocky Mountain Regional Manager **Barton Barnhart** and Senior Vice President and Upper Great Plains Regional Manager **Lloyd Linke**.

At the Mid-West Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting, Dec. 7-8, LeBeau spoke again, along with Peterson and Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer **Mike Montoya**.

See the complete presentations and other materials at wapa.gov, [The Source](#)



CIO speaks to Intelligence class

On Dec. 13, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer **Mike Montoya** spoke to a National Intelligence University class.

Montoya's talk – his fourth engagement with the program – covered WAPA's history, business, scope and COVID-19 response; how his Information Technology program supports WAPA's mission; hydropower's role in the energy sector; and industry challenges and threats.

The Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessment course, which is part of the school's Master of Science and Technology Intelligence program and a requirement for its Homeland Security Intelligence certificate, has 13 students who represent various military service and intelligence community agencies.

